

A denominational microstate in Albania?

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On 22 September, the Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama, addressing the United Nations General Assembly on the occasion of the *Summit of the Future*, announced his government's willingness to start the procedures for a constitutional reform that would allow the establishment of an Islamic-inspired microstate in the territory of the Republic¹.

The beneficiaries of the "concession" of sovereignty would be the Bektashi, an Islamic minority, equal to 10% of all Albanian Muslims. They gravitate towards Shi'ism and developed within the Ottoman Empire around the thirteenth century. Structured as a brotherhood, they spread throughout the Balkans.

The alternating events that marked this religious denomination are connected to the fact that the janissaries, i.e. the sultan's trusted guards, affiliated to it, who became protagonists of the policy of the Sublime Porte until their dissolution in 1826².

Among their characteristics stand out the mystical sensitivity, deriving from Sufism, moderation in the observance of the precepts, and strong roots in the territory.

For example, they do not oppose the consumption of wine, they do not demand the wearing of the veil, they recognize women as equal in the enjoyment of rights and participation in liturgical life, they simplify the fulfillment of the precepts of Islam. In addition, they accept practices proper to other monotheistic denominations, such as the pronouncing of promises of celibacy, the veneration of sins, the veneration of Christian saints³. It is no coincidence, therefore, that they are frowned upon by groups of orthodox Muslims.

These are the characteristics that facilitate dialogue with the state authorities, who see them as a reliable interlocutor and an element capable of curbing the fundamentalist tendencies that animate some fringes of the Muslim religion.

The programmatic statements of the Albanian Prime Minister, of course, reveal very little about the order that would originate in this patch of land of about one hundred and ten thousand square meters in the capital Tirana.

¹The full text of the speech is published on <https://mia.gov.al/en/usa-new-york-speech-of-h-e-mr-edi-rama-at-the-summit-of-the-future/>.

² Cfr. CARLO ALFONSO NALLINO, voce *Bektāshī*, in *Enciclopedia Italiana*, 1930, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bektashi_\(Enciclopedia-Italiana\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bektashi_(Enciclopedia-Italiana)/) e JOHN KINGSLEY BIRGE, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes*, Luzac, London, 1937, pp. 78-86.

³ Cfr. BABA REXHEB, *The Bektashi Path*, Babagân Books, Chicago, 2016.

In fact, the object of the "transformation" would be the current World Center of the Bektashi, which would acquire sovereignty for the performance of its prerogatives in favor of the faithful scattered throughout the world.

The Albanian Prime Minister's speech, as can be read in various newspapers, aroused amazement and curiosity: on the one hand, it is noted that, if the project were completed, the "State of the Bektashi" would arise as an entity with a territory smaller than the City of the Vatican State; on the other hand, the implications of the transfer of sovereignty to a religious denomination that has never had personalities under international law are underlined⁴.

Now, the constitution of a denominational state by a unilateral act of another state might seem an unusual political move: pending further developments, it would be appropriate that guaranteed sovereignty should not be just a façade, that the choice should not exacerbate the already complex tensions present in Muslim society, that the Bektashi denomination should prove capable of maintaining its autonomy and independence in spiritual matters, without the rich concession turning into potential blackmail.

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⁴ Cf. EMMA DE RUITER, *L'Albania progetta un microstato come il Vaticano per l'ordine musulmano Sufi*, in *Euronews*, September 22, 2024, <https://it.euronews.com/2024/09/22/lalbania-progetta-un-microstato-come-il-vaticano-per-lordine-musulmano-sufi>.